

The illustration depicts a fantastical scene where a wooden sailing ship is flying through the air. The ship is constructed from dark wood with yellow trim and is mounted on four large, spoked wooden wheels. A large, white, bird-like creature, resembling a stork or a crane, is attached to the ship's mast with ropes, acting as a wing. The ship is filled with several people, including men, women, and children, all looking out with expressions of wonder and excitement. The background is a bright, warm yellow, suggesting a sunny day. In the lower-left corner, a small village with several houses featuring conical, thatched roofs is visible on a green hillside. Another smaller bird-like creature is flying in the lower-right corner.

The Flying Ship

Ukrainian folk tale

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There once lived an old man and an old woman who had three sons, two of them clever young men and the third, a fool. The two old people loved their two clever sons dearly, and not a week passed but the old woman would give them each a fresh shirt to wear. But as for the fool, everyone was always mocking and scolding him. He would sit on the stove in his rough linen shirt and if the old woman gave him nothing to eat, hungry he would stay.

One day the news reached the village that the tsar was to hold a feast to which all of his subjects were invited and that the princess would marry him among them who built a flying ship and came flying to the palace in it.



The two clever brothers went to the forest, cut down a tree and began to think how they could build a flying ship out of it when an old man, one as old as old can be, came up to them.

"More power to your elbow!" said he. "And do give me a light, for I want to smoke my pipe."

"We have no time to bother with you, old man!" the brothers replied and began thinking what they were to do about the ship again.

"You'll have a fine trough there for the pigs to eat out of," said the old man, "but you'll no more see the princess than you can see your own ears."

With that he vanished, and as for the two brothers, they tried hard to build the ship and tried again but nothing came of it.

"Let us mount our horses and go to town," said the elder of the two. "We might not marry the princess, but we'll at least take part in the feast."

And the two old people blessed them and helped them to get ready for the journey, the old woman baking them some fine white bread, roasting a whole suckling pig for them and giving them a flask of good Ukrainian vodka to take along with them.



The two brothers mounted their horses and set off on their way, and when the fool learnt about it he began begging his parents to let him follow them.

"I want to go where my brothers went!" said he.

"Do you, you fool!" his mother said. "Why, the wolves will eat you up in the forest."

"No, they won't!"

And there was no doing anything about it, for go he would.

So the old woman got out some stale black bread and filled a flask with water, packed them in a bag, gave the bag to him and sent him on his way.

The fool set off for the forest, and it was when he was nearing it that he saw, coming toward him, an old man, who was as old as old can be and had a snow-white beard that reached to his waist.

"Greetings, Grandpa!" the fool said.

"Greetings to you, my son!"

"Where are you going, Grandpa?"

"I walk all over the earth helping people who are in trouble. And where are you off to?"

"To the tsar's palace where a feast is being held."

"Can you make a ship that can fly of itself, then?"

"No, I can't."

"Then why do you go there?"

"My brothers did, so why shouldn't I! I might make my fortune there."



The fool reached into the bag and brought out some bread, and lol—it wasn't stale or black at all but very light and fresh and made of the finest wheat, the kind of bread the lords eat on holidays. The fool wondered at the sight of it, but the old man only laughed.

They had a good rest and ate their fill, and the old man thanked the fool and said:

"Listen to me, my son, and do as I say. Go to the forest and find the biggest of the oak-trees there, one whose branches grow crosswise. Strike it three times with your axe and yourself drop to the ground and don't get up till you hear someone calling you. By that time the flying ship will have been built for you, and you can get into it and go wherever you have a mind to. But there is one thing you must do and that is to take along with you whoever it is you meet on your way."

The fool thanked the old man and bade him goodbye. He then went into the forest, found the oak-tree whose branches grew crosswise, struck it three times with his axe, dropped to the ground and fell asleep. By and by he heard someone calling him.

"Oh, very well. Sit down and let's have a rest and something to eat. Show me what you have in that bag of yours."

"Get up, for great good fortune has come to you!" the voice said.

The fool jumped up, and lol— what did he see before him but a flying ship that was made of gold and had masts of silver and sails of silk. All he had to do was to climb into it and go wherever it was he had a mind to.

So in he climbed without another thought, hoisted the sails and was off and away!

And, oh, how fast went the ship and how smoothly!

On and on flew the fool, and when some time had passed, there below him, stretched out on the ground and with one of his ears pressed close to it, he saw a man.

"Good day to you, my good man, and what are you doing there?" the fool called.



"I am listening hard, for I want to hear if the tsar's guests have all gathered at the palace."

"Is that where you are going?"

"Yes!"

"Climb in, then, and I'll take you there."

The man climbed into the ship and away they flew together!

Some time passed, and there below them they saw a man. He was hopping along on one leg and had his other leg tied to his ear.

"Good day to you, my good man!" the fool called.

"Why are you hopping along there on only one leg?"

"If I were to use both legs one step of mine would take me all the way round the earth, and I don't want that!" the man called back.

"Where are you going, then?"

"To the palace, to attend the tsar's feast."

"Climb in with us, and I'll take you there."

"Very well!"

The man climbed into the ship, and away the three of them flew!



Some time passed, and there beneath them they saw an archer taking aim with his bow and arrow. What he was aiming at they could not tell, for round him there spread a wide field with not a bird or a beast in sight.

"Good day to you, my good man!" the fool called. "What are you aiming at? There's not a bird or a beast to be seen anywhere."

"That's what you think! You don't see them, but I do."

"You do?"

"Yes! There's an eagle sitting in an oak-tree beyond that forest there, a hundred miles away from here."

"Come, then, climb in with us!"

The man climbed into the ship and away the four of them flew!

Some time passed, and they saw an old man walking along the road below. He was carrying a sack of bread.

"Where are you going in such haste, Grandpa?" the fool called.

"To get some bread, it'll be dinner-time soon!" the man called back.

"But you have a whole sackful with you!"

"True, but it's not enough for me. One bite, and I'll swallow it all!"

"Come, then, climb in with us!"



The old man climbed into the ship and away the five of them flew!

Some time passed and they saw another old man below them. He was walking along the shore of a lake and seemed to be searching for something.

"What are you doing there, Grandpa?" the fool called.

"Looking for some water, for I'm very thirsty!" the old man called back.

"But there's a lake just in front of you!"

"True, but I can drink all the water in it at one gulp."

"Come then, climb in with us!"

The old man climbed into the ship and away the six of them flew!

Some time passed, and they saw a third old man below them. He had a sack of straw over his shoulder and was trudging along the road.

"Good day to you, Grandpa! Where are you taking the straw?" the fool called.

"To the village yonder."

"Isn't there any straw there?"

"There is, but not the kind I have!"

"And what kind is that?"

"A special kind. No matter how hot the day and how strong the sun, all I have to do is scatter it over the ground and it'll turn to snow."

"Come, then, climb in with us and we'll go to see the tsar together!"

"Very well."

The old man climbed into the ship and away the seven of them flew!

Whether they flew for a long or a short time nobody knows, but they got to the palace and were just in time for the feast.

Kegs of ale and beer had been rolled out into the courtyard, and set up in front of the palace were tables groaning with food: oxen just off the spit, sausages and hams, roasted fowl, gruel and milk, and other good things as well. The kegs stood open, and you could eat and drink your fill!



Present at the feast was half the tsardom: lords and peasants, rich and poor, young and old! And the fool's two clever brothers were there too, sitting side by side at one of the tables.

The fool and his friends came flying up in their golden ship, they landed just under the tsar's windows, and climbing out of the ship, joined the feasters.

The tsar was much surprised, for never did he think to see a simple peasant step out of the ship! The man was barefoot and had on a pair of pants made of some rough cloth and a shirt with patches all over it.

The tsar clutched his head in horror.

"Never will I let a daughter of mine marry a peasant!" said he to himself.

He began to think how to get rid of the fool and at last decided to give him a number of tasks to do.

"Go and tell that man there," said he to one of his servants, "that he'll not get my daughter in marriage unless he brings me some living water before this feast is over. And if he fails to do it, it'll be out with my sword and off with his head!"

Off went the servant to do the tsar's bidding, but Big-Ear, who heard what the tsar said, passed it all on to the fool.

The fool felt sad and crestfallen. He sat there on the bench with hanging head and could not eat or drink.

"Why so sad?" Fleet-Foot asked him.

"The tsar wants me to bring him some living water before this feast is over, and how am I to do it!"

"Do not grieve, I'll get it for you."

"Well, see that you do!"



The tsar's servant now came up to him and told him what the tsar's orders were, but the fool never turned a hair.

"Tell His Majesty that I will get the living water for him," said he.

He looked at Fleet-Foot who at once untied his leg, the one that was bound to his ear, and was off like a shot! But when he had filled a flask with some living water, which only took him a moment to do, he felt very tired.

"The feast is still in full swing, so I think I'll sit down under this bush here and rest for a bit," said he to himself. And with these words he dropped down on the grass and fell fast asleep. The feast was all but over, and seeing that he had not come back, the fool sat there more dead than alive.

"This is the end of me!" said he to himself.

Big-Ear put his ear to the ground.

"Fleet-Foot is a good-for-nothing if I do say so myself," said he. "He is lying under a bush, fast asleep."

"How'll we wake him?" the fool asked.

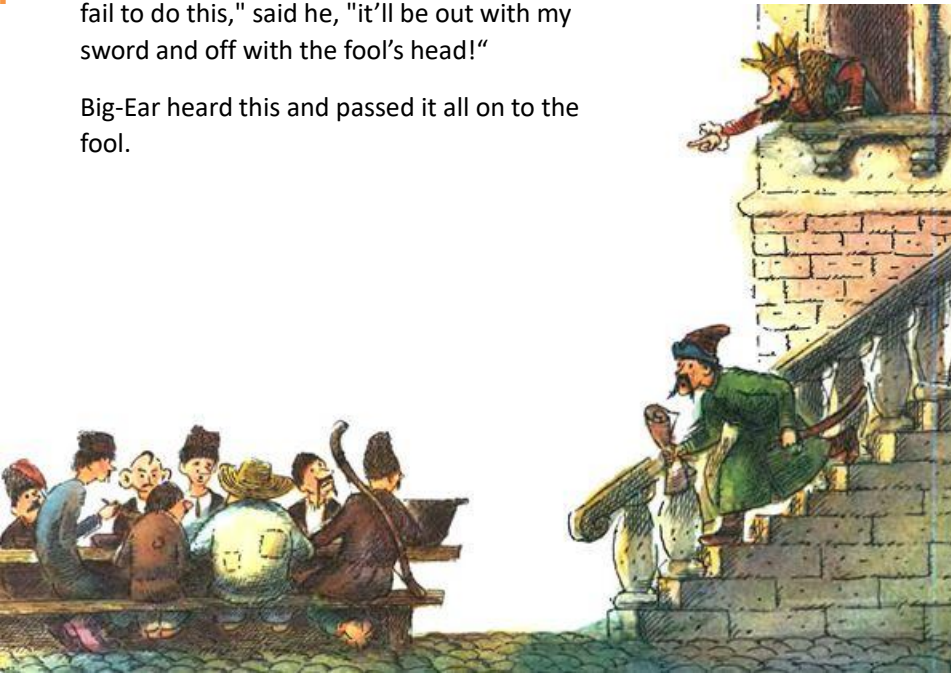
The Archer got to his feet.

"I'll do it!" he said.

He drew his bow and shot an arrow straight at the bush, and the branches swayed and scratched Fleet-Foot who jumped up, took one step, and was back at the palace with the living water before the guests had finished eating.

The tsar was much surprised but said nothing. He turned to his servant and bade him tell the fool that he could marry the princess if he and his friends ate up two dozen roasted oxen and a dozen ovenfuls of bread at one swallow. "If they fail to do this," said he, "it'll be out with my sword and off with the fool's head!"

Big-Ear heard this and passed it all on to the fool.



"What am I to do!" the fool cried. "Even one loaf is too much for me to swallow!" And he hung his head and was very sad and crestfallen.

"Don't you grieve, my friend," said Eat-All. "I'll eat it all up by myself and ask for more."

The tsar's servant now came up to the fool and was about to give him the tsar's message, but the fool stopped him, saying:

"I know what the tsar wants me to do. Go and tell the cooks to prepare the food."

The two dozen oxen were soon roasted and a dozen ovenfuls of bread baked, and Eat-All set to with great gusto, polished off all of the food and asked for more.

"I could have done with twice that much!" said he.

Now, this made the tsar very angry, and he ordered the fool and his friends to drink a dozen kegs of beer and a dozen of wine at one gulp.

"If this is not done, it'll be out with my sword and off with the fool's head!" said he.

Big-Ear heard him and passed it all on to the fool again.

This time it was Drink-All who came to the fool's aid.

"Never fear, my friend, I'll drink it all up and ask for more," said he.

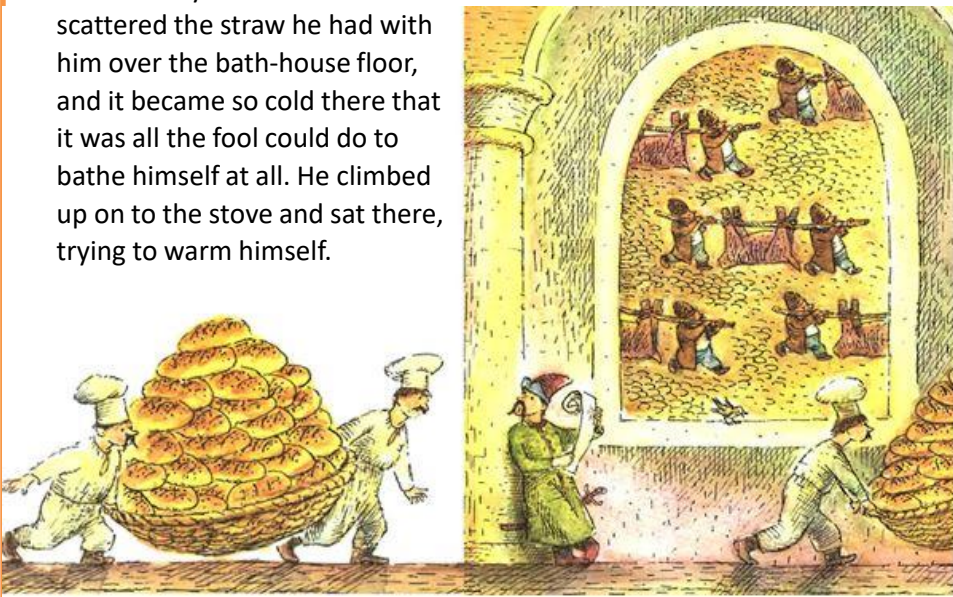
The tsar's servants rolled out a dozen kegs of beer and a dozen of wine, and Drink-All drained them all at one gulp and left not a drop.

"A meagre treat that!" said he. "I could have drunk twice as much."

The tsar saw that it was not easy to get the better of the fool.

He bade his iron bath-house to be heated till it was red-hot and then ordered the fool to bathe in it.

The fool made for the bath-house together with Freeze-All. They came up to it, and it was as though it was on fire, for the heat fairly took their breath away! But Freeze-All scattered the straw he had with him over the bath-house floor, and it became so cold there that it was all the fool could do to bathe himself at all. He climbed up on to the stove and sat there, trying to warm himself.



And the tsar, thinking that the fool had been burnt to death, sent his servants to the bath-house to see what was left of him.

The servants came inside, and lo!—there was the fool sitting on the stove.

"A poor bath-house this!" said he. "So cold is it here that it's as if it hadn't been heated all winter."

The tsar was quite taken aback, for what was he to do with the fool now!

He thought long and he thought hard and at last he thought of a way of doing away with him.

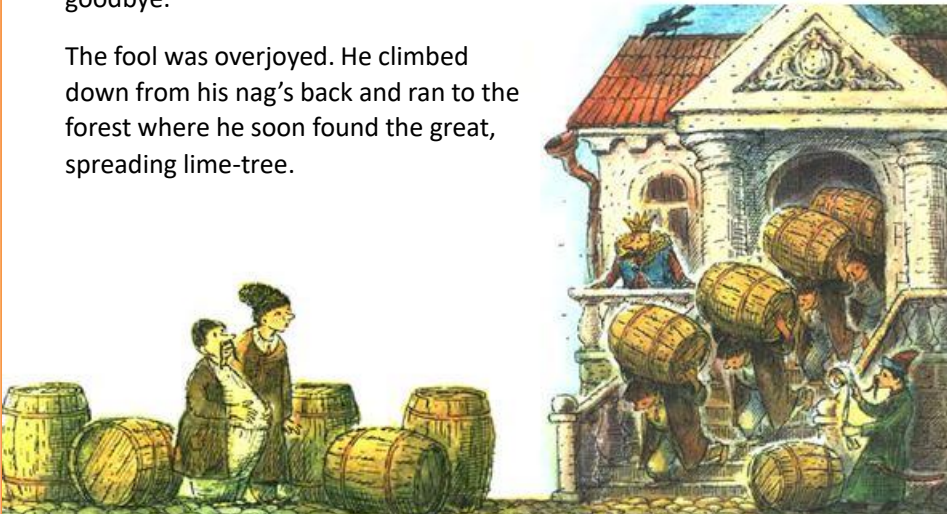
"The king of the neighbouring land is marching his armies against us," said he, "and not only will I fight him but will test my daughter's suitors at the same time. She shall marry the bravest of the brave among them!"

Many knights now gathered together and went off to fight, and the fool's two elder brothers mounted their horses and joined them, but the fool had no horse and could not do this. He begged the tsar's groom for one, and the groom gave him a dock-tailed nag that could hardly drag itself along the road so very old was it. All the knights had gone on ahead and left him behind them, and there he was unable to get the nag to so much as move from the spot!

All of a sudden whom should he see coming out of the forest and toward him but the old man who had helped him to get the flying ship.

"Do not grieve, my son, I will help you," said he. "As you will be riding through a large forest you will see a great, spreading lime-tree to the right of you. Tell the lime-tree to open, it will do so, and a saddled horse with a bag tied to the saddle will run out of it. After that if ever you are in need of help just say 'Come, now, out of the bag!' and you'll see what you shall see. And now goodbye."

The fool was overjoyed. He climbed down from his nag's back and ran to the forest where he soon found the great, spreading lime-tree.



"Open, lime-tree!" he cried.

The lime-tree did as he asked, and a most wonderful steed with a mane of gold and a harness so well furbished that it blazed like fire ran out of it. Tied to the saddle was a bag and across it hung a coat of mail, a helmet, a sword and a shield.

The fool put on the helmet and the coat of mail.

"Come, now, out of the bag with you!" he called.

And lo and behold!—huge numbers of men, a whole army, came pouring out of it.

The fool jumped on the steed's back, and riding at a gallop at the army's head, made straight for the enemy. And so well did he fight, hacking away right and left with his sword, that he vanquished one and all. However, towards the battle's end he was wounded in the leg, and it was then that the tsar and his daughter came riding up on horseback toward him.

Seeing that the knight who had been fighting so bravely was wounded, the princess brought out her kerchief, tore it in two, and bandaged his wound with it.

The fighting over, the fool rode away into the forest and only stopped when he saw the great, spreading lime-tree before him.

"Open, lime-tree!" he cried.

The lime-tree did as he asked, and he hid his horse, his bag, his coat of mail, helmet, sword and shield inside it and put on his patched shirt and worn pants again.

As for the tsar, he now sent his servants to all the corners of the land bidding them find the brave knight whose wound the princess had bandaged with her own kerchief. The servants searched for him among the rich, but could not find him, so the tsar ordered them to search for him among the poor as well. From house to house went the servants, and it was when they had almost given up the search that they came to the fool's hut. It was a poor little place standing at the very edge of the town, and when two of the servants came inside they found the fool's two elder brothers there having their dinner and the fool baking flat-cakes for them. One of his legs was bandaged with the princess's kerchief, and seeing this, the tsar's servants wanted to take him away with them, but the fool begged them not to, saying that he was much too dirty and unkempt to be shown into the tsar's presence.





"Let me at least go to the bath-house and bathe first," he said. "And you wait for me here and have some dinner."

"Oh, very well, only don't take too long!" said they.

They sat down at the table and began eating the flat-cakes, and the fool ran to the forest and up to the great, spreading lime-tree.

"Open, lime-tree!" he cried.

The lime-tree did as he asked, and the fool's horse ran out of it and waited for the fool to mount him.

The fool now took out the chain-mail and helmet and put them on, and so handsome did he look that none could compare with him. He jumped on the horse's back and rode to the palace, and when the tsar and the princess saw him they were as glad as glad can be! They showered many honours upon him, and he and the princess were married then and there.